

With the executive order announcing the Preserve America initiative, President George W. Bush directed a stronger focus on safeguarding our national heritage. To head the initiative, the President tapped Texas businessman and well-known preservationist John L. Nau III, chair of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the Texas Historical Commission.

Nau's vision encompasses revitalized communities and a new appreciation for the past. His involvement in preservation is both public and personal. An avid student of history, he has a long record of philanthropic support for heritage causes. Owner and CEO of Silver Eagle Distributors—the nation's second largest distributor of Anheuser-Busch products—Nau brings business acumen as well as passion to caring for the nation's patrimony, evidenced by his accomplishments in forward-moving Houston.

Nau recently talked with Common Ground about his views—and where Preserve America will take us.

THE ROAD AHEAD

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN NAU, CHAIRMAN OF THE
ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ALL PHOTOS TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION EXCEPT AS NOTED

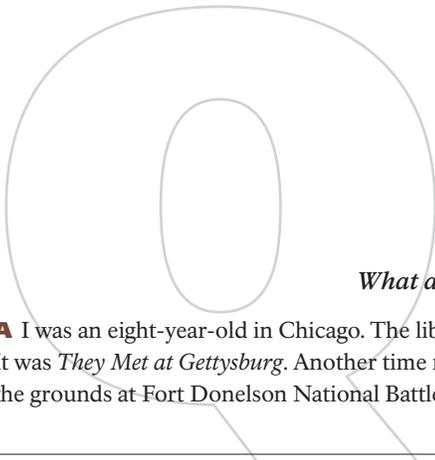




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Left to right: Bloody Lane, Antietam National Battlefield; Preserve America Chairman John Nau; Cannons at Antietam.



What attracted you to history as a youngster?

A I was an eight-year-old in Chicago. The library sent me home for a note from my mother to take out a grown-up book. It was *They Met at Gettysburg*. Another time my dad took me along on a business trip during spring break. I got to walk the grounds at Fort Donelson National Battlefield.



These were wake-up events that told me as a youngster, boy, I want to do this.

Q What drew you to the preservation field? Was there something about the grounds that really touched you?

A What drew me in . . . it was an evolution of many, many years. As a young person, I found a sense of history at these places that I couldn't feel or grasp in a book. Since the first trip to Fort Donelson.

Books are somewhat one-dimensional. It's not just that you're walking where the soldiers were. You understand the place. You understand the role of a ravine. You

see how deep it is. At the fort, you grasp the difficulties the Union Navy had, what with the height of the bluff where the Confederates stationed their guns.

On the first day at Gettysburg there was a Confederate attack on a place called Oak Hill. When you read about it you don't understand how a line of men could lie in an open field and not be seen. But when you're there, you see a clear dip in the ground. You grasp how a military tactic was used to great effect.

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understand what leadership is all about.

Q You must've felt the presence of the soldiers too.

A You can't go there and not have a sense of the men who were fighting that day. Especially when you're alone. You absolutely sense it. And there are hundreds of places like it—Devil's Den at Gettysburg, the cornfield at Antietam.

Q How did you first get involved in preservation?

A In the late 1980s, my wife and I decided to give each other an anniversary gift that would have an impact on many peo-

Left below: San Antonio Missions National Historical Park; Below: Reenacting a Texas battle scene from the Mexican-American War.



ple over generations. So every year, we buy and donate land near a national or state park. We've done that at Shiloh, at Harpers Ferry, at a state park in Louisiana called Port Hudson. We actively invest in preservation.

Q How do you pick your candidates?

A We've worked with Frances Kennedy of the Conservation Fund. She's given us two or three options a year. We picked the piece of dirt at Shiloh because the 8th Texas Cavalry fought there.

Q Your recent Good Brick Award acknowledges that Houston is a tough

town for preservation, and a lot gets done behind the scenes by people like you. Can you tell us a bit about the behind-the-scenes accomplishments?

A I was involved in helping pass Houston's first preservation ordinance. Houston has a reputation of knocking down its history, you know, since it's such a forward moving city, the energy capital of the world.

It's a little bit of a wrong image. The preservation community just had to make the case. Since we did that in the mid-1990s, we've had dramatic success keyed

to the renovation of the old Rice Hotel. We've not just preserved buildings, but created an economic stimulus for a vibrant nightlife, bringing residents back downtown for the first time in probably 30 years. It's an environment both historic and modern—a setting for people who want a loft or an office in something other than a glass-and-steel highrise.

What I've added is simply knowing some of our elected officials and making the case that preservation is not a cost.

Q What are you most proud of as a preservation advocate?

A Those times that I've had an opportunity with my children and other young people to show that through preserving places you learn about the values and the heritage of this country. You can't touch Thomas Jefferson without going to Monticello or the University of Virginia, or the pioneers without experiencing the Santa Fe Trail or Cumberland Gap. I've had the privilege of seeing their eyes light up when history comes alive at these places.

The other side is my various volunteer positions. I feel very good about helping preservationists see that they can't be successful by simply saying that a building's old and has to be saved. There has to be what I call sustainable preservation, which includes a business plan. If you want to save something, first you have to ask yourself why.

You bring together historical societies, federal, state, and local agencies, departments of commerce—and put them at the table with the financial development people. You come up with a business plan to get people to come into the community.

In Texas this began in the mid-'90s. Our program stimulates development throughout Texas—particularly in rural areas, where, as in any state, most historic events took place.

With a business plan, our grandchildren won't be trying to figure out how to save the same buildings 30 years down the road.

Q Can you give us some examples outside of Texas?

A No group, certainly no people, are better positioned to benefit from preservation and economic development than Native Americans.

When I was young—summering in Wisconsin—I learned how sacred places are not like a battlefield or a wagon run. There is a spiritual reverence. Once I asked some tribal members about an island out in a lake. They responded, “We don't go there.” That answer has stayed with me. So I understood very young that many places are off-limits.

But let's go to Taos Pueblo in New Mexico. Unique culture, unique architecture. Economic development brings tourists for skiing and the arts, and then they're directed out to Taos Pueblo. That's how I wound up there. I was absolutely captivated.

The target market for heritage tourism, in my opinion, are the baby boomers about ready to retire. They want to travel, and they want to travel in the United States before they go overseas. That was a fact before 9/11. After 9/11, the numbers are even higher. Almost three-fourths of baby boomers want to travel, and do it in the U.S.

Almost always the number two or number three reason is to see history and culture. Yet when I say this in speeches to Native American groups, there is resistance.

Q Why?

A A gentleman stood up from a tribe out west and said we don't want tourists because all they do is rob our archeological sites. I said the National Park Service has been dealing with this for years, and has developed ways to deal with it.

I said these people are not tourists, they're thieves. And they're a small minority. The vast majority, 99 percent, are there to learn and experience. So you set up policing. But you don't close off the economic benefits because of a handful of people.

Q What's your vision for preservation in the post 9/11 world?

A Preservation plays an essential role in telling the story of why we're fighting—to protect the places where events shaped who we are as Americans. When part of an educational package, preservation is one of the greatest weapons in the war on terrorism. The terrorists are threatened by our way of life, by our freedoms. And the best way to understand who we are is to experience the places that define us.



Left below: San Antonio's River Walk; Center below: Restored Texas courthouses, with then-Governor Bush at a rededication; Right below: Historic house.



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Q In your view, what is the role of the Federal Government in preserving the nation's patrimony?

A I think it is one of leadership by example. I firmly believe that there are very few spots that should be preserved simply because they are what they are. Gettysburg is one; the Statue of Liberty.

The Federal Government should not—never—be seen as the only governmental entity whose job it is to save things. One reason that the Commerce department was included in the Preserve America executive order is that they

are the “use it” side of preservation. To simply preserve federally owned assets and then not have them be part of an education and economic development program would be wrong. Just as wrong as not preserving them.

Q Can you give an example of what Commerce could do?

A Commerce could play a role in helping states organize heritage tourism programs. Some states do a very effective job already. For those that don't, make the case using best practices from those that do.

In any state, there are federal assets, state assets, county and privately owned assets. They all sit near each other, and an effective program combines them. GSA has great buildings that could be easily included in urban walks. If the state doesn't want to do it, then we've got to make a better argument.

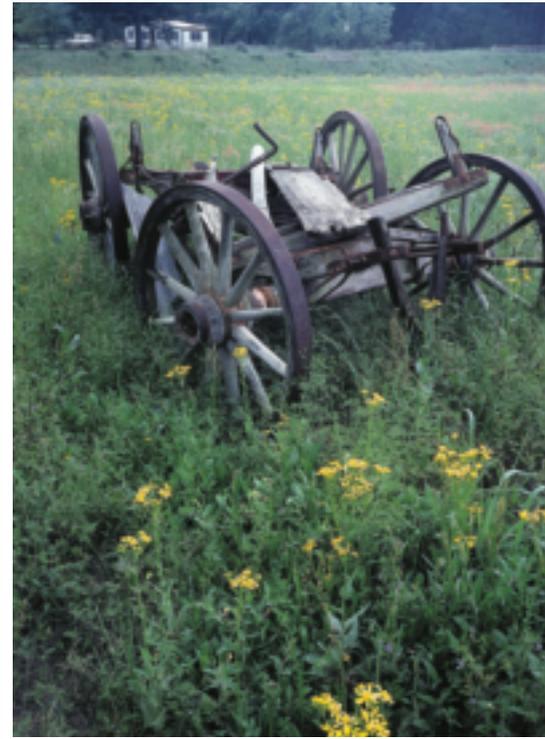
Q So you see Commerce as a consultant, a supplier of best practices?

A That's correct. The executive order seeks to create an inventory and status report of sites. Once we have a list of—let's call them heritage trails, whether in Virginia or Wyoming—then Commerce can work with overseas tour groups, providing choices for visitors to learn about the American experience.

Q An information clearinghouse.

A Right on target. That's one thing I learned in Texas. There were pockets of information that had never been brought together. Once we did that, the end product became better than the sum of its parts.

■ *Preservation plays an essential role in telling the story of why we're fighting [the war on terrorism]—to protect the places where events shaped who we are as Americans.*



Obviously, the National Park Service should play a clear role. But the Park Service doesn't necessarily have the skills to market programs to tourists.

I had a great conversation with the superintendent of San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. Because of the Alamo's success—two million visitors a year—you'd think all the missions were getting big numbers. Yet they had one of the lowest visitations in the park system.

Then I went to the Alamo, and it became very obvious why. There was no reference that said look, if you want more of this architecture, just go down the road 15 miles. It's called coupon-bounce-back marketing. If you get 10 percent to go down the road, everybody's happy. When we created the Texas Independence Trail, we made sure to include the missions.

Q What role do you see for the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation?

A First and foremost, the council has to continue its role as manager of the preservation process. I assure everyone that this will continue. But when you read the original 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, it clearly says the council is to advise the President, the administration, and Congress on issues of preservation.

Well, to the members of Congress, preservation is a very local thing. It seems to me, based on my experience in Texas, that the way to help preservation on the local level is through the economic development model. Give people a way to help themselves.

I see our role as working with the Park Service, with Commerce, with the Federal Highway Administration, with all the agencies to create the best possible business environment.

Absolutely, the council has to encourage efficient preservation reviews, eliminate duplication, and help the states. At the same time, it has to advocate for a strong heritage tourism program

Above left: Independence Hall, where the state declared itself autonomous in 1836; Above: Relic of frontier days.

and help the Federal Government play that type of role.

Q A consulting role.

A Part cheerleader, part consultant.

Q In Texas, how did you engage then-Governor Bush and the First Lady in preservation?

A In President and Mrs. Bush you have two people who understand the story of America as told through its places. The largest preservation program by a state was undertaken by then-Governor Bush—the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program.

I saw Governor and Mrs. Bush walk through these tremendous cathedrals of the prairie, reborn as part of our economic

Below: Marker for a destroyed Texas seaport, victim of 19th century hurricanes; Below right: Spanish mission Espiritu Santo in Goliad, Texas.



development story. The courthouses were not just where justice was dispensed. Life began there with birth records, and ended with death notices. Everything in a community's life took place in or around the courthouse or town square. Preserving these buildings was not just about bricks and mortar. It was about safeguarding the spirit of these places.

Along the way, I've had some real Norman Rockwell experiences, seeing children's eyes light up at the 18- and 20-foot ceilings. Some of these buildings were in pretty bad shape. Today, they're just marvels.

Q What's the vision for Preserve America?

A It's a vision that the administration has for identifying, preserving, and integrating our historic assets,

local and national. But you've got to tell the story too. It has to be a good visitor experience. In talks, I equate it to my beer business. If the beer doesn't taste good, people won't be back.

The big vision is that preservation is not a cost, it's an investment. You don't preserve in a cocoon.

Q What are the national preservation program's most pressing needs as you see them?

A Everyone expects funding to be the first answer. I don't think that's it. Over the years, preservationists have been seen as having their hands out. I use a visual in my speeches. I put my hand out, then turn it into a handshake, the handshake of partnership. Once you make the economic case, you have a seat at the table. *Then* you ask for funds, not as a gift but as an investment.

Q What's ahead for you in the next 10 or 20 years, professionally and personally?

A Well, number one, I've got to keep my eye on the ball—I have a business to run. But I've enjoyed serving the President in my role as chairman of the Advisory Council and working with its great staff. I look forward to continuing my work with Mrs. Bush for Preserve America. And I've remained vice-chairman of the Civil War Preservation Trust.

God willing, there will be enough work out there to keep my interest in preservation. And I'm going to find time to go back and walk those battlefields and be a tourist myself.

For more information, contact the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Suite 809, Washington, DC 20004, (202) 606-8503, www.achp.gov. For more on Preserve America, visit www.preserveamerica.gov. Contact the Texas Historical Commission at P.O. Box 12276, Austin, TX 78711-2276, (512) 463-6100, www.thc.state.tx.us. The Civil War Preservation Trust is at www.civilwar.org.